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THE BIBLICAL WORLD

CONTINUING

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EDITORIAL LETTER.

TO THE READERS:

It was suggested a month ago, as a proposition to which all would give their assent, that to know the Scriptures better is to know God better. This proposition contains the essence of the whole matter, and it is so self-evident to those of us who believe at the same time in the Scriptures and in God that it may really seem to be a commonplace statement. So vital, however, is the connection of the truth in this statement with our work as editors and your work as patrons of this journal that perhaps, commonplace though it may seem to be, it deserves our consideration. It is easy enough, of course, to say that a knowledge of the Scriptures gives us a knowledge of God; but it is evident from the history of the study of the Bible that, after all, many men have obtained very incorrect conceptions of God from the Bible itself; and, moreover, the particular way in which the Bible is understood determines, in large measure, the particular knowledge of God which is thus obtained.

It has been agreed that it is incumbent upon us, as believers in the Bible, to make every effort to lead our neighbor also to accept it as we accept it. It is, at all events, our duty to make

every effort possible to bring him into touch with it and into a familiar knowledge of its contents, for we all know that indifference, and indeed hostility, are due more frequently to ignorance than to other causes. The young son of one of our editors was asked the other day how he liked the children of the next-door neighbor, who had recently moved in. His reply was: "*I hate them.*" On being further interrogated as to what they had done to him to incite such a feeling, he answered: "*I do not know them.*" And so it is with the world. Not to know is, in a host of instances, to hate. It would seem, therefore, that to make our friends, whose minds are wholly indifferent to the Bible, really acquainted with its contents would be to take away this indifference, which, in many cases, amounts to hostility. Here, then, is one class of people with whom we shall have to do, and our task, though a difficult one, is easily defined. We are to take such steps as will make this man or woman really know what the Bible contains. The difficulty with Robert Ingersoll was that he did not know the Bible. The present generation has failed to produce a more conspicuous example of actual ignorance of what the Bible is and what it represents. If some man or woman had taken the time and trouble to have made clear to Mr. Ingersoll the real truth in the matter, his lamentable and pitiable utterances would never have been made. Mr. Ingersoll hated the Bible because he did not know it. He hated the God of the Bible, because he was utterly ignorant of the God represented in the Bible.

But now, those of us who address ourselves seriously to the task proposed—namely, the teaching of the Bible, whether in pulpit or class-room or parlor—will soon come to see that our greatest difficulty, perhaps, lies not with those who are distinctly hostile, nor, indeed, with those outside the pale of the church who are indifferent, but rather with those who, innocently enough, suppose that they know the Bible and what it teaches of God, and who, at the same time, are honestly living in accordance with the knowledge which they are supposed to possess. The pastor of a prominent church in the state of Iowa remarked to the writer, only three days ago: "The trouble with

our churches is the fact that they have no proper conception of God." This, we will remember, is exactly what the old prophet, Hosea, said of the people of his time: "They do not know Jehovah." Perhaps the people of Hosea's time could have offered an excuse for such ignorance. It will be more difficult for the people of our time to find such an excuse. Here, we may assure ourselves, is, after all, the real problem; namely, to convey to those who are honestly and sincerely the friends of the Bible such a knowledge of its representations concerning God as that a true conception of God may be gained. And this, as a matter of fact, will cover the whole ground; for it is perfectly clear that, if those who profess to accept the Scriptures and to know God really understand and appreciate the God of the Scriptures, through them the world at large will soon come into possession of the knowledge of God.

We wonder, now, whether, after all, we have said anything worth the saying. All this surely has been said many times and much more effectively. And yet it must be said many times more. And what is it, in a word? This: that, while a knowledge of the Scriptures gives us knowledge of God, it must be a right knowledge of the Scriptures, in order to give us a right knowledge of God. Is it proper to say: Better no conception of God than a wrong conception of him? This surely would have been true in the case of Mr. Ingersoll, cited above. It does not follow, however, that everyone may have the same full conception which is accorded by God himself to a few. But the ideal thing is a right conception, so far as it goes. It cannot be disputed that the Bible has been used with the most injurious effect in many instances. How now may we who have assumed the grave responsibility of teaching the Bible—and we include with ourselves every reader of the *BIBLICAL WORLD*—how now, we ask, may we so do our work as not to bring upon ourselves the reproach of presenting such a conception of its contents, and such a conception of God, as shall drive men away, instead of drawing them to the book and its great author? There must be some representation which is reasonably correct, and there must be some way of presenting this representation in

such a manner as to make it effective. Is it not our duty to study how we shall find this representation for ourselves, and, when it has been found, to place it before those with whom we may be brought into contact ?

We are going to propose this month, as the book to be commended to our readers, George Adam Smith's *The Book of the Twelve Prophets, Called the Minor Prophets*.¹ For special reasons we have been making a personal study of these volumes, and although much has been said in their favor, much yet remains to be said. It is no more than sheer justice to state that, in our opinion, nothing printed in the English language on the minor prophets will give either the ordinary reader or the careful student a more vivid and adequate understanding of these twelve sacred books. No preacher can afford not to have them, for they are the best specimens of expository preaching with which we are familiar.

Our readers will join with us in mourning the loss of one of our own number, for justly we feel that during these past six or eight years Professor Bruce was one of our number. Among his contributions to the BIBLICAL WORLD have been the following: "The Future of Christianity," Vol. VI, pp. 248-59; "Four Types of Christian Thought": I, "The Teaching of Christ in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke," Vol. VI, pp. 455-66; II, "The Pauline Epistles," Vol. VII, pp. 6-19; III, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," Vol. VII, pp. 94-104; IV, "The Fourth Gospel," Vol. VII, pp. 168-79; "The Rev. Marcus Dods, D.D.," Vol. VII, pp. 245-51; "The Rev. A. B. Davidson, D.D., LL.D.," Vol. VIII, pp. 257 ff.; "The Rev. G. Adam Smith, D.D.," Vol. VIII, pp. 1 ff.; "The Rev. Professor S. D. F. Salmond, D.D.," Vol. VIII, pp. 347 ff.; "Messiahship as Conceived by Jesus," Vol. XII, pp. 369 ff.

For his sympathy in our work and for the coöperation which he so generously gave we are greatly indebted. During his last

¹ Published by Messrs. A. C. Armstrong & Son, New York, 1896-8 (Vol. I, pp. xviii + 440; Vol. II, pp. xix + 541; \$1.50 per vol.), in the "Expositor's Bible" series.

visit to America he was good enough to spend hour after hour, and day after day, in advising with us as to the policy of the journal, in suggesting new contributors, and even in arranging details connected with the publication of special numbers. An unselfish, broad-minded man has gone home. May it prove true that he leaves behind, among his many pupils, a score or more who will now rise up and continue his great work.

We have abundant evidence, if evidence had been needed, to convince us of the desire of the readers of the BIBLICAL WORLD to coöperate with the editors in making the journal more effective in every way. The letters which have been received in reply to the editorial letter are all that we could wish for in number and in character. Most valuable suggestions have been received and are now under consideration. We ask our five thousand friends to continue this interest and to believe that we are seeking as best we may to help them, and that we hope in turn to receive from them the help we need.

THE EDITORS.